The Co-Creation of a Retail Innovation: Shoppers and the Early Supermarket in Britain

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In this paper we examine shoppers' reactions to the development of early supermarket retailing in post-war Britain. Positioning our discussion in relation to multi-disciplinary contributions on the role of consumers in innovation, we argue that more attention needs to be given to the shopper's input in the debate on retail innovation, including the supermarket. New oral history data drawn from a nationwide survey is presented in support of our arguments. Shoppers' contributions to the supermarket innovation are shown to be multi-faceted in nature, incorporating processes

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of co-production and value creation; processes that were altered in the transition from counter-service to self-service retail environments. Shoppers' discussions of such alterations were frequently structured around four aspects of interaction; with the physical environment of the store, with the goods for sale, with other shoppers and with shop staff. Whilst increasingly part of 'ordinary consumption' routines, the data highlights that in the switch to the supermarket, shopping became a more reflective activity and one that resulted in a variety of experiences and emotions.

Introduction

The supermarket is an important innovation that transformed retailing in postwar Britain.[1] However, detailed explorations of shoppers' reactions toward, and involvement in, the changing service encounters occurring in these new retail formats are generally lacking. This is a significant shortcoming because shoppers had to negotiate fundamental changes to their interactions with the physical environment of the store, the retail staff, other customers, and the products for sale.[2] In this essay we begin to fill this gap in understanding through an analysis of the attitudes and behaviors of those who shopped at the early supermarkets (up to about 1975). We do so through the conceptual lens of co-creation, drawing upon literatures from business history, the social sciences, and marketing that share a concern with the role of consumers, or users, in innovation.[3] As we discuss below, retailing provides a compelling case for analysis of co-creation thanks to its role in integrating the inputs of a network of agents including the shopper.[4] Our evaluation includes matters relating to both the physical and mental tasks of shopping, including requisite learning and skills development. It also encompasses a consideration of the experiences shoppers could undergo in the supermarket and that led to feelings and emotions such as satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and, more occasionally, fun, and excitement. More widely, our

1. Bowlby, "Supermarket Futures," in *Shopping Experience*, eds. Falk and Campbell; Bowlby, *Carried Away*; du Gay, "Self-Service"; Shaw et al., "Selling Self-Service"; Alexander et al., "Promoting Retail Innovation."

2. Some consideration of the goods for sale in the supermarket and the use of branding is provided by Davies and Elliott, "The Evolution of the Empowered Consumer."

3. Our consideration of innovation incorporates innovation based upon entry into new markets. For a wider discussion, see Preissl "Service Innovation," in *Innovation Systems*, ed., Metcalfe and Miles.

4. Lusch et al., "Competing Through Service."

study complements attempts within the literature on consumption to break down the binary oppositions that have been constructed not only around production and consumption, but also around the home and shop, and more generally, the public and private spheres.[5]

While our focus in this paper is upon co-creation resulting from shoppers' adoption, we remain mindful of the influences of resistance and non-adoption on the innovation process.[6] We also acknowledge that shoppers form only part of a wider network of agents, including product manufacturers and marketers, who were actively involved with retailers in the development of the supermarket innovation.[7]

In contrast to most existing studies of the history of the British supermarket, this paper forefronts shoppers' own perceptions and reflections on the new shopping encounters in which they participated.[8] This is important for, valuable as they are, contemporaneous market research data reflect the wants, needs, and desires of the client.[9] The shopper data we present are derived from a new collection of oral histories gathered as part of a wider UK Arts & Humanities Research Council funded project designed to enhance understanding of consumers' reactions toward the postwar supermarket.[10] The remainder of the discussion is structured into three principal sections. First, we explore the literature on co-creation and assess its significance to our understanding of the activities of the shopper in the new supermarkets. In the second section we present an overview of the development of the supermarket in postwar Britain before outlining our methodology. Last, we present the findings of our analysis of these oral histories in support of our evaluation of shoppers' roles in the co-creation of the supermarket innovation, and discuss their implications.

The Supermarket as Innovation: Perspectives on the Input of the Consumer

The significance of the consumer to the co-creation of innovations such as the supermarket is illustrated in literatures drawn from a

5. Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 762; Agnew, "The Give-and-Take of Consumer Culture," in *Commodifying Everything*, ed. Strasser.

6. Kline, "Resisting Consumer Technology," in *How Users Matter*, eds. Oudshoorn and Pinch; Wyatt, "Non-Users Also Matter," in *How Users Matter*, eds. Oudshoorn and Pinch.

7. Alexander et al., "Promoting Retail Innovation."

8. See also Davies and Elliott, 'The Evolution of the Empowered Consumer.'

9. Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 769.

10. Gareth Shaw and Andrew Alexander, "Reconstructing Consumer Landscapes: Shopper Reaction to the Supermarket in Early Post-War England."

variety of perspectives and between which there remains only partial cross-fertilization of conceptual and empirical material.[11] Economic analyses of the retail sector highlight the importance of the shopper in relation to the switching of distribution costs between them and the retailer.[12] This is arguably nowhere more evident than in relation to the rapid diffusion of the supermarket, in which self-service organization saw shoppers replace the retailer in undertaking much of the work in handling and transporting goods through the store and to the home.[13] Retailers promised supermarket shoppers various forms of possible recompense for the additional costs they incurred in undertaking the new form of shopping including reduced time spent in queues, a reduction in the overall work of food shopping as a result of the opportunities for one-stop shopping, enhanced freedom of choice through the personal selection of goods and, eventually, price reductions.

The potential of a wider consideration of the shopper's role in the supermarket innovation process can be discerned from research in the fields of business history, the history of technology, and social studies of science.[14] This reveals how the capacity and willingness, or need, of consumers to commit to, and invest in, an innovation constitutes part of the context that determines its success or failure. In doing so it moves us beyond a passive interpretation of the role of consumers. It also highlights how decisions on use are often embedded in a myriad of social relations.[15] Oudshoorn and Pinch's edited volume *How Users Matter* is concerned with understanding how users of innovations "consume, modify, domesticate, design, reconfigure, and resist technologies" and promotes use of the term "co-construction" to highlight this dynamic in technological innovation.[16] While much of the work focuses on non-historical subject matter, its potential to

11. This is reflected in the use of different terms for the input process, including collaboration, co-construction, prosumption, co-production, and more recently co-creation, as the respective debates have developed. We favor the use of the term co-creation as discussed below.

12. Betancourt, *The Economics of Retailing*; Dawson, "Output Considerations."

13. McClelland, "Economics of the Supermarket."

14. Agnew, "The Give-and-Take of Consumer Culture," in *Commodifying Everything*, ed. Strasser; Bijker et al., *The Social Construction of Technological Systems*; Bijker, *Of Bicycles, Bakelites and Bulbs*; Kline, *Consumers in the Country*; Oudshoorn and Pinch, *How Users Matter*; Yates, "How Business Enterprises Use Technology"; Nye, *Electrifying America*; Cowan, "The Consumption Junction," in *The Social Construction*, eds. Bijker, Hughes, and Pinch.

15. Oudshoorn and Pinch, *How Users Matter*; Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous."

16. Oudshoorn and Pinch, *How Users Matter*, 1.

stimulate conceptual and empirical work in business history has been recognized.[17]

Research on innovation in the service industries also analyzes the role of consumers in the innovation process, exploring the significance of adding customer know-how to the formalization of innovation in service-based relationships.[18] In their study of innovation in services, Gallouj and Weinstein explain that "the system ... through which the consumer makes direct use of his knowledge and competences, represents in particular the various ways in which the client himself is 'put to work' within the service firm."[19] Recent attempts to promote a "service-dominant logic" (S-D logic) in marketing are particularly significant in that they offer a more comprehensive framework for analyzing the role of the customer.[20] S-D logic represents an attempt to reformulate marketing thought and practice. Its primary relevance to this study is the enhanced significance that it affords the customer through its assertion that "value is always co-created with and determined by the customer."[21] This approach contends that the application of skills and knowledge (so-called "operant resources") is the fundamental basis of exchange, that is to say exchange revolves around service not goods. Organizations, households, and individuals act as resource integrators. Similar to aforementioned literatures, S-D logic identifies the role of the customer in co-producing the core offering. However, it contends that this co-production activity is subordinate to the customer's role in *value creation*; there is no value until an offering is consumed.[22] The centrality of the consumer to the co-creation of value gives significance to attempts to identify those factors that determine their willingness and ability to co-create and the risks attendant in such activity.[23] It has also led to efforts to extend the original propositions of S-D logic to more comprehensively acknowledge the contextual, experiential, and meaning-laden nature of value through consumption.[24] Through such attempts S-D logic begins to connect with a far wider body of work concerned with

17. Scranton, "Book Reviews: How Users Matter," 818.

18. Gallouj and Weinstein, "Innovation in Services"; Preissl, "Service Innovation," in *Innovation Systems*, eds. Metclafe and Miles; den Hertog, "Co-Producers of Innovation," in *Productivity Innovation*, eds. Gadrey and Gallouj; Ducatel, "Information Technologies," in *Innovation Systems*, eds. Metcalfe and Miles.

19. Gallouj and Weinstein, "Innovation in Services," 546.

20. Vargo and Lusch, "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic"; Lusch et al., "Competing Through Service"; Vargo and Lusch, "Service-Dominant"; see also Bendapudi and Leone, "Psychological Implications"; Xie et al., "Trying to Prosume."

21. Lusch et al., "Competing Through Service," 8.

22. Lusch et al., "Competing Through Service," 8.

23. Lusch et al., "Competing Through Service"; Etgar, "A Descriptive Model."

24. Vargo and Lusch, "Service-Dominant."

consumption within both marketing itself and in the humanities and social sciences.[25]

We argue that existing references to the early supermarket as a prototypical example of customer co-creation give undue emphasis to the obvious alteration in the pattern of physical work.[26] More attention needs to be given both to the development of shopper know-how and competences that accompanied such alterations, and to the wider experiences that surrounded shoppers' engagement with the supermarket innovation. Next, we illustrate the significance of these two themes.

Shopper know-how is typically tacit in nature and arises through multiple interactions with the retail environment. In the case of the supermarket, new knowledge was essential because of the altered nature of shopper–retailer collaboration. Its importance would become magnified as retailers opened larger supermarket outlets in which shoppers were faced with not only a new physical selling environment, but also new modes of interaction with staff, other customers, and with an increasingly broad and deep range of products and services. Hence, while food shopping has been portrayed as a typically unreflective activity,[27] in the switch to supermarket retailing it had the potential to become otherwise as consumers worked out how best to shop in the new formats. Customer learning was aided not only by the retailers, but also by a wider network including packaging manufacturers, brand marketers, and shop equipment suppliers who were also active in co-creating the supermarket.[28] This is not to suggest, of course, that shoppers were always receptive to the exhortations of the "supermarket industry." Work in cultural studies reveals the potential for consumption to resist attempts to reorder the retail landscape. For de Certeau and his co-authors, in everyday practices, such as shopping and cooking, consumption reveals itself by its capacity to creatively use products imposed upon it "by a mass distribution system that wants to conform the crowd to imposed models of consumption . . ."[29]

25. Arnould et al., "Toward a Cultural Resource-based Theory of the Customer," in *The Service-Dominant Logic*, eds. Lusch and Vargo; Arnould, "Service-Dominant Logic."

26. See, for example, the discussion in Bendapudi and Leone, "Psychological Implications."

27. See Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity* on the unreflective nature of much food shopping activity.

28. For a further discussion on customer learning and attempts to educate the shopper, see Dowling, "Femininity, Place and Commodities"; Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife," in *All the World*, eds. Andrews and Talbot; du Gay, "Self-Service"; Alexander et al., "Promoting Retail Innovation"; Alexander et al., "Innovation and Shopping Practices."

29. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 31; Giard, "Introduction to Volume 1," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, eds. de Certeau, Giard, Mayol, xxii.

Shopping is an activity that is contextualized within both normative societal and cultural discourses and personal narratives of life changes.[30] At a general level, studies have illustrated the interdependence of retail innovation and shopping in the context of macro-socio-economic changes. Sophie Bowlby, for example, illustrates the interrelationship between spheres of work and home in women's lives by reference to changes in food retailing during the 1960s, with its growing emphasis on convenient shopping environments for the busy woman increasingly likely to be in paid employment outside of the home.[31]

Supermarket shopping typically represents a good example of a so-called "ordinary consumption" practice, with its focus on the inconspicuous, conventional, and routine.[32] Experiences in the supermarket generally revolve around the comparatively mundane, less memorable tasks of shopping for basic goods. As Strasser observes, "few seek their entertainment in the dinnertime run to the supermarket."[33] However, this is not to suggest that supermarket shopping is always devoid of higher-level experiences and related emotions.[34] These can be deciphered in historical studies of retailing and shopping. For example, Rachel Bowlby in her own discussion on responses to the arrival of the supermarket in Britain chronicles some of the positive reactions to early supermarkets such as the sense of novelty people experience in being able to serve themselves. She also reminds us that shoppers' first interactions could also be characterized by considerable difficulty, as shoppers had to adapt to, and felt manipulated by, alienated, trapped, and under surveillance in the new shopping environments.[35] Similarly, Alexander et al. illustrate how the socially-embedded nature of female food shoppers' activities, tied to discourse on the identity of the postwar housewife, could influence their engagement with emerging retail formats and make food shopping a more intensely reflective activity than we might otherwise expect.[36]

Historical analyses of the role of brands and of merchandising are also informative in assessing the place of experiences and meanings

30. See Trentmann, "Beyond Consumerism"; Miller et al., *Shopping, Place and Identity*; Nell et al., "Shopper Narratives."

31. Bowlby, "Planning for Women to Shop"; see also Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife," in *All the World*, eds. Andrews and Talbot; McMeekin and Southerton, "Innovation and Final Consumption."

32. Gronow and Warde, *Ordinary Consumption.*

33. Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous," 768.

34. See Pine and Gilmour *The Experience Economy* for a more detailed discussion on the importance of experiences.

35. Bowlby, *Carried Away.*

36. Alexander et al., "Innovation and Shopping Practices"; Jackson et al., "Retail Restructuring"; Miller, *A Theory of Shopping.*

in early supermarket shopping. In relation to brands, Davies and Elliott contend that they increasingly played a dual role in the postwar supermarket, as a means to assist in making choices between the increased numbers of goods, and as a mechanism for the construction of identity.[37] In this process of identity construction, as elsewhere, consumers were beginning to play a more active role.[38] Similarly, du Gay notes that contemporary trade sources pointed retailers toward the importance of the "personalisation" of merchandising.[39] The significance of these findings is illuminated by our discussion of co-creation for, as Agnew suggests, "it is not the meanings that merchandisers give but the meanings that customers take that count."[40] Developments in brand management and merchandising assisted shoppers' determination of the potential symbolic and functional value to be gained through shopping at the new supermarkets.

The Development of Supermarket Retailing: Understanding the Shopper's Perspective

The number of self-service stores in Britain grew from as few as ten in 1947, to an estimated five hundred or so by 1950.[41] Later estimates suggested that there were as many as six thousand three hundred self-service stores by 1960, and more than twenty-eight thousand in operation by the end of that decade.[42] An increasingly significant amount of self-service retailing was taking place in larger supermarket formats that began to appear in Britain during the 1950s, although attempts to differentiate between supermarkets proper and other large self-service formats proved challenging even for contemporary industry analysts.[43] The best estimates, however, reported that there were around fifty supermarkets in existence in 1950, swelling in number to 572 by 1961.[44] By 1969 there were an estimated three thousand four hundred supermarkets in Britain.[45] These stores were typically

37. Davies and Elliott, "The Evolution of the Empowered Consumer," 1117.

38. Arvidsson, "Brand Management," 81.

39. du Gay, "Self-Service"; see also Alexander et al., "Innovation and Shopping Practices"; Usherwood, "Mrs Housewife," in *All the World*, eds. Andrews and Talbot.

40. Agnew, "The Give-and-Take of Consumer Culture," in *Commodifying Everything*, ed. Strasser, 16.

41. Fulop, *Competition for Consumers.*

42. *The Nielsen Researcher*, 1963; 1970.

43. For a discussion of this see Alexander, "Format Development." An increasingly adopted definition of the supermarket was reported by McClelland in 1962 (McClelland, "Economics of the Supermarket," 154.).

44. McClelland, "Economics of the Supermarket"; Birchall, *Co-op.*

45. *The Nielsen Researcher*, 1970.

smaller than their counterparts in North America.[46] A minimum sales area of only 2,000 sq. ft. was adopted as a benchmark in early attempts to define the format during the late 1950s, and it was suggested that in 1967 the typical supermarket in Britain was still only some 4,000 sq. ft. in size.[47] Nonetheless, Nielsen reported that self-service operations (both self-service stores and supermarkets) accounted for 15 percent of grocery turnover in 1959, rising to as much as 64 percent only ten years later.[48]

The degree to which the success of the supermarket depended on altered inputs from shoppers is reflected in the concerted and prolonged efforts of goods manufacturers and retailers to understand shoppers' reactions to the changing service encounter. The housewife was the target of such enquiries.[49] One of the earliest studies to directly garner the shopper's viewpoint on the self-service approach to retailing was the British Market Research Bureau's (hereafter BMRB) 1950 *Self-Service in Great Britain*. This report reflected "[t]he extent to which self-service will be taken up as a new method of retailing food depends ultimately on what the customers think of the system. If they do not take to it kindly, it will never become firmly established."[50] A number of shopper surveys followed during the next two decades that, among other aspects of shopper attitudes and behaviors such as frequency and timing of shopping trips, distances travelled to shops, and loyalty to particular retailers, gave detailed attention to reporting their reactions to the increasingly rapid pace of change to self-service approaches and particularly to the new supermarket format.[51] The intention was to provide a detailed picture of the likes and dislikes of shoppers "as seen through her own eyes and with her own comments on it."[52]

The concern reflected in these surveys was, increasingly, not whether self-service and the supermarket would become firmly established, but whether supermarkets were meeting the real needs of shoppers. Even BMRB's occasionally cautionary analysis in 1950

46. For a discussion on the development of the supermarket in North America, see, for example, Zimmerman, *The Supermarket*; Goldman, "Stages in the Development of the Supermarket"; Mayo, *The American Grocery Store.* For discussion on other European countries, see OEEC, *The Economic Performance*; de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire.* On Australia see Humphery, *Shelf Life.*

47. Anon. "The Self-Service of Sainsbury's."

48. *The Nielsen Researcher*, 1970.

49. Joyce, *The New Housewife*; see also Miller, "Consumption as the Vanguard of History," in *Acknowledging Consumption* ed. Miller; De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire.*

50. BMRB, *Self-Service in Great Britain*, 46.

51. Bird, *Mrs Housewife*; Bird, *Mrs Housewife* (2nd ed.); JWT, *Shopping in Suburbia*; BMRB, *Shopping in the Seventies.*

52. Bird, *Mrs Housewife*, 5.

acknowledged that "the ground has been prepared for the spreading of self-service in this country."[53] In the series of studies that followed, attention increasingly turned to the potential of the supermarket format to extend its influence. Arguing that it was insufficient to say that supermarkets are "doing well," J. Walter Thompson's (hereafter JWT) 1963 publication *Shopping in Suburbia*, commissioned by the retailers Premier Supermarkets and WH Smith, turned its attention to a series of issues that potentially jeopardized customer loyalty, seeking answers to questions such as the reasons some customers failed to do a one-stop shop at the supermarket and, more particularly, why shoppers were seemingly unconvinced about prepackaged perishable foods. The subtitle to JWT's (1964) follow-up study, *The Changing Face of Supermarket Shopping*, asked the question: "Are supermarkets making the progress they expected in gaining the affection of the housewife?" It concluded that their record of growth was impressive, but that one might still question whether they represented the "housewife's choice."[54] For JWT, supermarket firms were not yet offering sufficiently differentiated images to allow customers either to develop firm loyalty or indeed "to indulge a taste for variety."[55] Six years on from this, BMRB's report *Shopping in the Seventies* would declare that "the age of universal supermarket shopping has arrived." Its authors considered that any future growth had to come from "winning further custom from existing shoppers rather than attracting new customers."[56]

Contemporary studies of consumer reactions to the supermarket thus reveal a shift in concern from anxiety about shoppers' responses to the self-service approach, to concerns with how to build and deepen customer loyalty to particular supermarket retailers. What remained constant was the extent to which understanding the reactions of the consumer was of central importance. Such understanding would help modify some of the assumptions about the consumer made by retailers during the innovation process.[57]

Method: Oral Histories and the Value of the Retrospective Approach

Forefronting the role of consumers in innovation requires methodological approaches that enable us to reconstruct not only how

53. BMRB, *Self-Service in Great Britain*, 12.
54. JWT, *The Changing Face of Supermarket Shopping*, 3.
55. JWT, *The Changing Face of Supermarket Shopping*, 11.
56. BMRB, *Shopping in the Seventies*, 4–5.
57. See Akrich, "De-Scription," in *Shaping Technology/Building Society*, eds. Bijker and Law.

consumers perceived innovations, but also how they engaged with them, and, more broadly, an appreciation of the social context in which they were situated and which, therefore, informed their participation in the process. Structured survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviewing have longstanding acceptance as methods for researching consumer behavior, including in relation to shopping.[58] The wider project from which this paper is drawn makes use of both shopper's biographical questionnaires and oral history interviews in a retrospective approach that asked interviewees and respondents to reflect on their attitudes and behaviors toward self-service and supermarket retailing and shopping between 1945 and 1975.[59] In this study we concentrate our analysis on the oral history data, which provides particularly rich material for revealing the complexities of the co-creation process.[60]

One hundred and twenty-two people who remembered shopping between 1945 and 1975 were interviewed; twenty-six of these were men and ninety-six were women, all between the ages of fifty-three and ninety-three. Interviewees were contacted on the basis of information they were invited to provide on the survey questionnaire and they were selected predominantly from five geographical regions, the South East of England, London, and the South West, North West, and West Midlands of England, although their shopping experiences were more geographically diverse. This design reflects one of the wider project objectives; to uncover any differences resulting from regional variations in the timing and extent of supermarket development. Interviews were conducted according to a semi-structured interview schema, with interviewees being asked about their shopping behavior throughout the period covered by the study. While our retrospective approach was in part dictated by the postwar timing of supermarket innovation in Britain, it also offered the benefit of facilitating reflections on the evolution of shoppers' relationships to supermarkets over a three- or four-decade perspective. Interviewees could identify changes in their behavior and attitudes to supermarkets throughout their lives—how they learnt new approaches to shopping, how the changing circumstances of their lives affected their use of supermarkets, or how supermarkets themselves changed over time.

58. For a recent example of outputs from a project combining these two methods, see Clarke et al., "Retail Restructuring"; Jackson et al., "Retail Restructuring."

59. For a detailed discussion of the project methodology, see Nell et al., "Investigating Shopper Narratives."

60. See also the discussions in Xie et al., "Trying to Prosume"; Elliott and Davies, "Using Oral History," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Belk; Witkowski and Jones, "Qualitative Historical Research," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Belk; Humphery, *Shelf Life*.

Our approach to the oral history data analysis comprises of two related strands. In the first strand we undertook a content analysis of the data concerned with shoppers' recollections and reflections of their very first experience of supermarket shopping. We began by developing a list of twenty-one codes to represent the themes associated with shopping in early supermarkets. This was based upon those identified in JWT's *Shopping in Suburbia*. The codes incorporate several factors that relate explicitly to the issues of co-creation including "helping yourself," "interacting with shop staff," "other shoppers/crowded," "fun and excitement," and "friendliness" as well as others in which the co-creative role of the consumer is perhaps less self-evident. We added the code "having to learn new ways of shopping/adapt" given its potential significance to co-creation, particularly in relation to the development of shopper know-how and competences. As is consistent with the content analysis method, the twenty-two codes were defined in precise terms to ensure they could be universally understood and that any researcher using the code book could readily identify which code applied to a particular piece of text.

In most of our interviews, interviewees were asked to discuss their first recollections of supermarket shopping. These were typically responses to the open-ended question, "Tell me about your first experience of a supermarket." Our intention was to leave the question sufficiently open to encourage interviewees to describe their experience in terms, and with emphases, that made most sense to themselves. Having collected these recollections, we subjected the interview material to content analysis to ascertain the relative significance of issues relating to co-creation that were highlighted by shoppers in the service interaction. Content analysis enables researchers to interrogate a text systematically to determine the respective relevance of key ideas or themes and has been a recognized method in consumer research since Harold Kassarjian's 1977 article in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.[61]

Of the interviews undertaken for the project, a total of sixty-eight have to date been verbatim transcribed and then coded using the qualitative analysis package, NVivo 7. Interview material discussing shoppers' first experiences of supermarket shopping constituted 23,175 words in forty-nine interviews. Of these, forty-six were suitable for content analysis on the theme of first experience of a British supermarket. This "first experience" material was then subjected to a coding process on the basis of our twenty-two codes. Our coding focused on whether or not a particular theme appeared in the interview text at any

61. Kolbe and Burnett, "Content-Analysis Research."

point, not the frequency of such mentions. For example, if feelings of excitement or enjoyment associated with shopping were mentioned by the same interviewee several times, it was simply recorded once as having been mentioned.[62]

The content analysis of interviewee responses to the open-ended question on their first experience of supermarkets constituted one strand of the oral history analysis. The second involved an initial reading and subsequent NVivo 7-assisted analysis of material from semi-structured interview questions that situated shopping within interviewees' lives over a longer period. This enabled the wider relevance of the co-creation theme to be identified. Interviewee reflections on their first experience of supermarket shopping constitute memory events that occurred over a relatively short time frame and which were, by definition, novel. By contrast, our other questions asked interviewees to discuss their routine shopping habits, and reveal periods of both continuity and change over a three-decade period.

Semi-structured oral history interviewing is characterized by the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer, and the emphasis on situating of recollections of individuals within the narrative context of their lives.[63] This allows interviewees considerable latitude in their responses and enables them to confirm or reject perspectives offered on events by the interviewer. Interviewees also have scope to introduce new issues, perspectives, and emphases that are most relevant to them. We found that interviewees could readily identify how changes in their work and family lives affected their shopping behavior throughout the decades, as they intuitively wove life experiences into their narratives of food shopping. The extent to which oral testimonies situate experiences within the life histories of individuals has been one of the significant advantages for us in the method we adopted.

The Shopper's Perspective on Co-Creation

Our content analysis of interviewees' first encounter with supermarket shopping clearly illustrates the significance of the co-creation

62. One of the defining criteria for content analysis is that the process of coding should be replicable, principally that the codes are defined in such a way that different researchers could agree on whether a section of text belonged in a category or not (see Kassarjian, "Content Analysis," 9). It is common practice, therefore, for parallel coding to be undertaken to measure the degree of consistency between coders in applying the same set of codes to the same content. Our own small-scale exercise in parallel coding confirmed a high degree of consistency suggesting that the parameters for each code were sufficiently unambiguous.

63. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*; Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli*; Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts.*

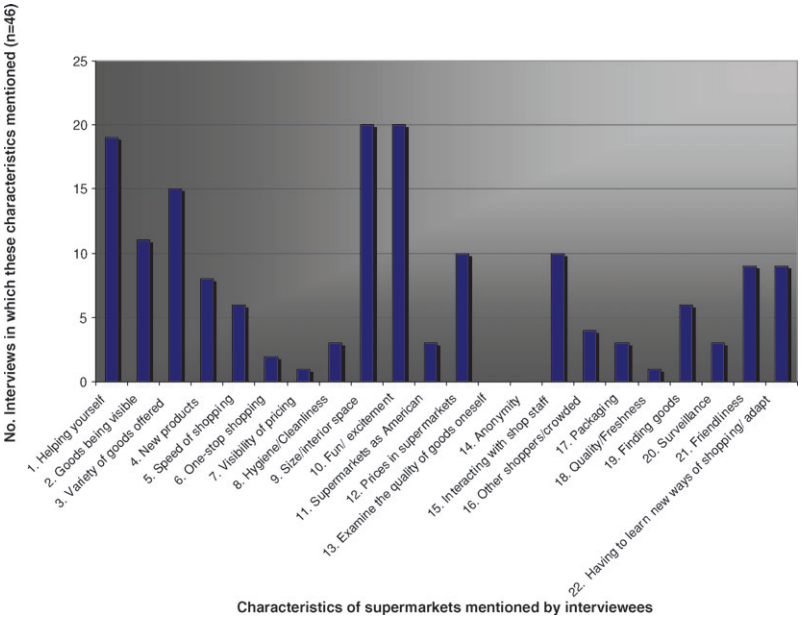

Figure 1 Key themes in interviews discussing first experiences of shopping in a supermarket.

process among our interviewees (Figure 1). Among the most-remarked-upon themes was that of "helping yourself," which incorporates discussion of both the altered patterns of work in shopping and the shopper's role in generating value from the retailer's offer. As we expected, the need to learn new ways of shopping and to adapt was also comparatively frequently remarked upon; it was mentioned more frequently than the availability of new products. Ten of our forty-six interviewees mentioned interactions with staff, highlighting the relevance of altered shopper–staff interactions to the supermarket service encounter. While partly expected given our focus here on shoppers' first encounters with supermarket retailing, the comparatively large number of references to excitement and fun reveals the significance of novelty of experience and the resulting emotions in the switch to the supermarket environment. This focus on first encounters might also provide some explanation for shoppers' reflections of the supermarket environment as being "friendly" and the absence of any mentions of it leading to feelings of anonymity. As observed below, our analysis of the broader discussions of the nature of supermarket shopping, which embrace a longer-term reflection of shoppers' engagement with the format, provides a sometimes differing picture with regard to the issue of anonymity. A similar observation is made in relation to shoppers' examinations of the quality of the goods for sale.

Co-Production: The Shopper at Work

Only a minority of our interviewees commented explicitly on the notion of supermarket shopping as being more physically laborious, that is to say as requiring an alteration in the distribution of physical work between the shopper and retailer. Those who did connected this with a perceived lack or decline in service on the part of the retailer, as illustrated by the following comment from one of our participants: "You did get people moaning, 'I asked that assistant where the porridge was and do you think she'd move her body from that counter, no she did not, I had to go and look for it myself'."[64] Some reflected directly upon the division of labor within the new retail environment of the supermarket. When asked by the interviewer whether she felt she was doing the work of the shopkeeper in the early supermarkets, Helen replied: "No, no, never. No because they had checkout girls didn't he? And you didn't fill the shelves you [were] just went 'round and helped yourself . . . I think it might have been different if you'd just had a basket and you'd had to carry the bloomin' stuff 'round in a basket but you didn't; you had a trolley to pull."[65]

Shoppers' mixed reactions to being required to handle and transport their goods are frequently commented upon in historical accounts of the rise of the supermarket.[66] It was also mentioned on many occasions by our participants, and often closely associated with a liking of being able to select goods for oneself. As such this may be viewed as a dynamic that gave precedence to shoppers' knowledge and preferences. As one respondent told us on shopping for greengrocery: "I can remember going in there and ladies saying 'I don't want to pick potatoes up' and I used to think well I bloody do because you can see what you're getting . . ."[67]

The need to adapt and learn in the new retail environment came across clearly in our interviews. Despite the comparatively small size of the early supermarkets, our respondents frequently reflected upon the new shopper-skills, or know-how, they needed to develop as they began to use them. One early supermarket shopper reflected:

> And they [United Dairies] were the first ones to actually turn over and I think it must have been very early 60's. Late '50s, early 60's and they were the first ones that turned over and oh my goodness, you'd go in there and everything's out on the shelves and oh yeah this is different and, and that was about the first experience. In those

64. Gill, OH/GC/F/–.
65. Helen, OH/491/F/1940.
66. See, for example, Williams, *The Best Butter*; du Gay, "Self-Service."
67. Margaret OH/104/F/1932.

> shops and then the Co-op there was a Co-op in Replingham Road and then they did it and you sort of walked round and got your own things. "Oh this is incredible."
>
> *[interviewer] . . . did it seem obvious to you to know how to shop in this self-service store?*
>
> No, really, no no you had to sort of learn all over again. I mean you'd walk 'round and, and find where things were and of course then when the, when the um supermarket, self-service type of shops came in you had things like the sugar bagged and the sweets in um, biscuits in packets.[68]

As retailers developed new, larger supermarket formats so the shopper had to familiarize herself with the new store environment offering a wider range of products and services, many new and often displayed and packaged in unfamiliar ways:

> . . . Tesco opened—the big Tesco—they took over the cinema, there was a cinema there, and er they made that into that vast—that was the biggest one you know we knew. That was the first time that we knew there were supermarkets that size. And you felt lost in there—there was—I mean you know you had so many aisles and so many columns and things and it, it confused us. We hadn't been used to seeing those sort of things. You imagine, you think of a cinema. Er, you know, emptied of all the seats un it was vast, it really was I mean you went in main door and then you got the aisles in front of you . . . [but] you had ohh going far back you know and everything you could imagine.[69]

Some interviewees reflected on the learning strategies involved. Margaret told us: "So what I used to do was make my list from a map of the shop in my head [ ] I used to have a map of the shop in my head. So the first time I went in I didn't go in to do the shopping, I went and bought something but had a jolly good look around and found out how it all worked . . ."[70]

Alongside understanding how the mechanics of the supermarket environment worked was the need to be appreciative of the possible dangers of the new way of shopping. The physical separation of aisle (choosing) and checkout (purchasing) needed careful negotiation.[71]

68. Joan, OH/765/F/1928.
69. Jeanette OH/673/F/1939.
70. Margaret, OH/104/F/1932.
71. Bowlby, *Carried Away*, 31; see also Davies and Elliott, "The Evolution of the Empowered Consumer."

Margaret continued: "... The other thing was not to overspend, you know not to go picking things up that you couldn't afford which was a great temptation to people I think and people did get in a mess with it or go picking up silly things that were not essentials."[72]

Value Creation: Experiences in the Aisles

As we have discussed, food shopping typically represents a good example of a so-called "ordinary consumption" practice. Nonetheless, the initial switch to supermarket shopping could generate a variety of emotions. For some the earliest experiences offered novelty and a sense of fun. One interviewee recalled:

> I can remember going into one of the Victor Value with my, with one of my auntie ... , and we were just shrieking with laughter because it seemed so, oh, oh, we're taking things off the shelves ourselves, you know um mind you the man was watching us like a hawk um so that was, that was just a lark ...[73]

While certainly not universal, new supermarket openings could also generate excitement for shoppers and were sometimes viewed as a representation of wider meanings. In this context fewer of our interviewees mentioned the notion of the "Americanisation" of shopping on their own volition than we had expected given the predominance of debates on the influence of American retailing methods in the contemporary trade press and given its place in narratives of the history of retail change postwar.[74] However, those that did equate the supermarket with "American" culture could present evocative recollections of the "otherness" of the supermarket. Jeanette told us: "Safeway opened at the other end of the High Street ... Um, so I was interested in Safeway, 'cos I read that Safeway was American, American owned and would be run on American lines which I found riveting 'cos people of my age, nearer, were really into films and things American were thrilling.[Yes] ... Um, I couldn't wait to see it."[75] This specific use of Safeway as an example is perhaps unsurprising given the firm's novel use of "American" concepts such as the in store snack bar and pram park.[76] Indeed, in completing our biographical questionnaire in advance of being interviewed, Jeanette wrote that Safeway "was

72. Margaret, OH/104/F/1932.
73. Jeanette OH/673/F/1939.
74. Shaw et al., "Selling Self-Service."
75. Jeanette OH/674/F/1940.
76. Humphery, *Shelf Life*, 75.

'Americanised' in the nicest way and it was a revelation—bright, clean, huge choice, innovative—and with even a cafeteria counter to get coffee etc! I thought I was in heaven."[77]

Many interviewees spoke to us of the other positive experiences that the supermarket could provide, some finding it liberating to pick up and handle goods and being able to input more directly into the selection process, others welcoming what they perceived as being the less controlled environment of the supermarket, being able to browse without purchasing. However, as we expected, experiences were not always positive. Yet others spoke of new pressures and anxieties that the supermarket shopper felt as a result of the altered ways in which they were put to work in the service encounter. Included among these were concerns over what were considered the invasive customer surveillance techniques employed by some supermarket retailers and fears over possible wrongful allegations of shoplifting.[78] Fairly typical of the type is the following reflection from Elaine:

> I mean there were, on TV there were reports of some famous people who'd been taken to court and really embarrassed and so on because they'd left something in the trolley and wheeled it through, yes I was quite conscious of how easily you could do that. Yes it's quite frightening really! Or simply just by being absent-minded, you know, and slipping something, instead of putting it into the trolley, putting into your bag or whatever.[79]

Cognizant that the development of the supermarket could lead to an alteration in the social contact involved in shopping, commercial and academic researchers alike quickly turned their attention to the new type of service encounters that could result.[80] The removal of counter service did not of course entail the removal of all vestiges of shopper–staff interaction prior to the checkout. Staff members were still present on the shop floor in various capacities, as shelf fillers, greeters, and managers. Some retailers maintained specialized staff-service in some food sections, particularly butchery, and others trialed customer advisers, employed to provide shoppers with information on recipes and answer questions on methods of preparation, in an effort to break down the perceived isolation of the shopping environment.[81]

77. Jeanette: QR/674/F/1940.

78. see Phillips et al., "Consumer Misbehavior."

79. Elaine, OH/77/F/1951.

80. McClelland, "The Supermarket and Society," 133; see also Sofer, "Buying and Selling"; JWT, *Shopping in Suburbia.*

81. For details see Alexander et al., "Innovation and Shopping Practices"; Sofer, "Buying and Selling."

Like their customers, supermarket employees were also developing new roles and know-how. In early experimentations this could apparently affect the atmosphere in store. This provides an alternative perspective to contemporary reports that shoppers perceived the supermarket environment as one that lacked friendliness.[82] One interviewee recollected:

> . . . I think in the early days they were trying to find their feet and the customers were trying to find their feet so therefore there was um, um not a lot of banter or rapport because they were trying so hard to have it clean and packed and the shelves packed . . . and you were sort of looking 'round wondering where it is and what is was and . . . I think it is only usage has made us accept and familiarize ourselves with it . . .[83]

Industry observers commented on the changing nature of the relationship between shop staff and shopper.[84] Small supermarkets, particularly those with smaller rural catchments, could retain much of their previous character despite the removal of counters. As Janet reflected of her early supermarket shopping experiences: "where it's only a small community, you still know the people so there's still a bit of chatter sort of thing because you know them, the same as you did in the counter-service ones."[85]

Nonetheless, in larger supermarkets many of the hitherto usual opportunities for interaction between customers and staff, and between one customer and another, could be either altered or lost. McClelland explained this in relation to numerous factors including the greater through flow of customers, themselves probably drawn from a wider catchment, shift and part-time working practices, job specialization, the increased role of advertising and branding, and the removal of many preparatory tasks from the sales floor.[86] Interestingly, anonymity and isolation were not emphasized as characteristics of the supermarket by any of our interviewees when they were asked to reflect on their first experience of supermarket shopping. However, several pointed to these factors as part of their reflections of shopping at the supermarket over the longer term. One interviewee expressed very negative feelings in this regard, considering the new supermarket environment to be more like a factory than the counter-service

82. JWT, *Shopping in Suburbia.*
83. Edith OH/566/F/1923.
84. McClelland, "The Supermarket and Society."
85. Janet, OH/JT/F/–.
86. McClelland, "The Supermarket and Society," 139.

retail environments she was used to.[87] Yet, for some others the anonymity possible in the supermarket was far from being a negative characteristic. As Pierre Mayol has observed, the social relationships, hierarchies, and roles of the neighborhood are carried into, and "polished up," in the shop.[88] Counter-service food shops could become the place for unwelcome scrutiny, especially for people who felt in some way marginalized, for example they were younger than other shoppers, or new to the area, or less well-off than their neighbors. Margaret remembered: "The other thing is listen to all your business! . . . into everybody else's business and by the time you went home, you knew everybody else's business apart from you own because everybody else knew it didn't they? And it was just—that's what I didn't like about the small shops . . ."[89]

Similarly, the altered interaction with sales staff in the supermarket was reported as a welcomed feature by a number of our interviewees who stressed what they perceived to be the more equitable nature of shopping with goods openly on display for all to see, not hidden away for distribution to favored customers. Other respondents told us of their dislike of what they considered to be the constant interruption and badgering of counter-service sales staff, the feeling of being compelled to buy something rather than to browse and the embarrassment that could be suffered in buying small quantities or cheaper variants of products. Sociological analyses of the period may have concluded that housewives were realistic about the motivations and commercial character of the shopkeeper's task, but counter service contained its own particular frustrations.[90]

It was particularly the customer–cashier interaction that came to typify the human aspect of the altered service encounter in the supermarket and the checkout cashier quickly became the subject of attention of retailers and researchers alike. As their experience of supermarket retailing increased, the personnel departments of businesses like that of the London Co-operative Society became increasingly focused on the need to find suitable employees for this semiskilled role.[91] Management theorists concerned with service quality have pointed toward the centrality of the cashier's role and highlighted the tension between customer and cashier as each sought to wrest control of the service encounter.[92]

87. Pauline OH//PB/F/–.

88. Mayol, "Propriety," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, eds. de Certeau, Giard and Mayol.

89. Margaret, WG10/MD//F/1946.

90. Sofer, "Buying and Selling."

91. See for instance *LCS No 2 Subcommittee Reports 3 Sept 1962– 20 Jan 1964.*

92. Rafaeli, "When Cashiers Meet Customers."

Shopper–checkout cashier interaction was also widely remarked upon in our oral histories. The checkout was frequently pointed to as one of the few places for social exchange, but for some of our respondents this appeared not to extend to discussion with other shoppers. As Elaine explained:

> I can't remember ever really having a conversation with anybody in the queue and that was a difference because as I say, at the corner shop, while you were waiting, you would always engage in conversation . . . rarely did you engage in a real conversation with anyone. So you would just wait there and sort of, daydream or your eyes would be going around the shop or whatever. Occasionally, I would exchange a few words with the girl on the till but very rarely with anybody in the queue.[93]

Supermarket retailers were understandably concerned about shoppers coming to view the supermarket as being "soulless." McClelland pointed to the pressures upon the cashiers that could inhibit their interaction with the customer; ensuring the basket is properly positioned, the need to concentrate on the practice (rhythm) of ringing up the goods to be purchased, and the awareness of a queue at their station.[94] Some of our respondents also sought to remind us that the interaction with checkout staff possible in today's supermarket was reduced in the early stores as a result of cashiers working with manual tills:

> . . . they didn't scan it then it was—it had to be tapped in didn't it, the price of everything so they were concentrating on what they were doing really, looking at the price and tapping it in because it wasn't scanned then, you know . . . Not personal at all really was it? No they had to concentrate on what they were doing so there wasn't much ban[ter]—there's a little bit more banter now because it scanned so they do have time to smile at you . . .[95]

Finally, and as we have noted above, decisions over food shopping at the supermarket could be influenced by wider social and cultural discourses as they were by personal narratives of life changes. We turn to this briefly now by way of concluding this section. We do so mindful of its significance in illustrating the possible constraints placed upon the women food shopper despite the seemingly unbounded

93. Elaine, OH/77/F/1951.
94. McClelland, "The Supermarket and Society," 137.
95. Anne, WG10/AB/F/1938.

choices of the supermarket aisles and because of its relevance to consumers' determination of the supermarket retailers' value proposition. Unsurprisingly, some of our interviewees reflected on the wide variety of goods in the supermarket and most did so in relation to their dominant role as provider of food for the family. The emphasis was perhaps strongest among women who were in employment outside of the home, reflecting aforementioned links between the supermarket innovation and macro-shifts in the organization of society. We illustrate this with one of a number of similar quotes from our interviewees:

> But when I did go back to work, that was when the supermarket was really handy. 'cos I just didn't have time to do the cooking, because before everything had to be made . . . , everything had to be done from scratch. And you accepted it; that was what homemaking was about. But when you were at work you thought 'Can I have something quick?' So suddenly there were tins with pies already done in them . . . and all sorts of convenience food. So you, you know, could certainly, you could certainly manage things a lot quicker once the supermarkets and self-services came into being.[96]

However, as JWT had suggested, it was unclear if the supermarket really represented the "housewife's choice."[97] The risk of the supermarket to the housewife came not only in selecting too many goods for her available budget, but also in selecting "inappropriate" goods, the perceived lack of quality of which could detract from her performance in her role as household food provisioner. These concerns were expressed most frequently in relation to the purchase of fresh goods such as meat and fruit and vegetables.[98] The extent of the problem was such that the difficulty of selling perishable goods in supermarkets was given particular attention in the research underpinning JWT's *Shopping in Suburbia*. It quoted Mass Observation research for the Economist Intelligence Unit that showed tinned goods, soap and detergent, butter and cheese, as the preferred goods to buy in a self-service store or supermarket. Bread and pastries, fruit and vegetables were among the least popular, and fresh meat was the least so.[99] Here we see the intersection of the vociferous discourse surrounding the role of the postwar housewife and retail innovation, represented through the consumption choices made by the women food shopper;

96. Doris, OH/573/F/1935.
97. JWT, *The Changing Face of Supermarket Shopping.*
98. See also Alexander et al., "Innovation and Shopping Practices."
99. JWT, *Shopping in Suburbia*, 27.

whether to shop at the new supermarkets and, if so, for what goods.[100] It was also a point reflected upon by some of our respondents:

> . . . you didn't want to buy your meat there or anything because it was pre-packed or pre-wrapped and it wasn't as good quality as you would have in the butcher's . . . so you would only buy basic cleaning goods and things. You wouldn't really want to—although some people did use it presumably. But they were considered to be not proper housewives, really. And they weren't doing good housekeeping if they went to the supermarket.[101]

Conclusion

In this research we have developed the notion of the co-creation of innovation as a framework for the analysis of the changing service encounters characteristic of Britain's early supermarkets. In doing so we extended upon an increasing acknowledgement within the literatures of business history, marketing, and the social sciences more generally of the central role of the consumer to the innovation process. Through our analysis of the ways in which consumers use and contribute to innovations in their everyday lives, we contribute to an issue widely acknowledged of being in need of more study.[102]

We were particularly keen to analyze the multifaceted nature of the shopper's contribution to the supermarket innovation in order to extend discussion beyond the oft-mentioned redistribution of the physical labor of shopping from retailer to shopper. Our wider evaluation of the shopper's contribution incorporated the need for renewed learning and competence development among shoppers as a result of the altered retail environment. Through this it extended to a consideration of the shopper's wider role in value creation as part of the co-creation process. With regard to the latter we have examined some of the ways in which both the shopper's individual circumstances, and the wider social-cultural contexts that underpinned shopping could influence their evaluation of, and propensity to unlock the potential value in the supermarket retailers' proposition.

The essay also considered existing conceptual arguments in the light of a new collection of oral history data specifically gathered to enable analysis of consumers' reaction to the development of the supermarket. This new data source is significant in moving us beyond

100. Alexander et al., "Innovation and Shopping Practices."
101. Gill, OH/782/F/1945.
102. See for example Warde, "Consumption and Theories of Practice"; McMeekin and Southerton, "Innovation and Final Consumption."

an otherwise general reliance of the findings of a small number of contemporaneous market research reports of the topic. Analysis of this oral history data confirmed the significant role of early supermarket shoppers in both co-production and value creation. Our interviewees gave less emphasis to co-production in terms of doing the physical work of shopping in the supermarket than one might expect given the existing literature. They more frequently drew our attention to their enhanced role in undertaking the mental work of shopping, particularly referring to the need for new shopper competences and learning surrounding the practice of choosing goods for oneself; acts which privilege the customer's knowledge and preferences. Our interviewees also revealed the place of experiences to their involvement in the co-creation process and the emotions these engendered. The experiences referred to were often the rather mundane and habitual ones that have been widely connected with food shopping.[103] However, our interviewees occasionally extended the discussion beyond this to include less routine experiences and explained the role of supermarket shopping in generating varied emotions such as excitement and (un)happiness.

Our oral histories also point toward the sometimes constrained nature of shopper's interaction with the supermarket offer. This constraint came in part as a result of particular individual and familial contexts in which food shopping was conducted and such contexts were frequently referred to in the shopper histories we collected. More generally it came through the social-cultural contexts of shopping, that is to say, through the intersection of supermarket shopping with the multiple discourses that permeated the lives of our shoppers. We limited ourselves to one illustration of such an intersection, in relation to postwar discourse on the "good housewife," but its wider significance should be clear.

Shoppers' discussions of their co-creative roles were frequently structured around four aspects of alteration in the service encounter: shoppers' interaction with the changed physical environment of the store, with the goods for sale, with other shoppers, and with shop staff. The wider range of goods for sale in the new supermarkets, and the role that the branding of these goods played was the subject of attention of contemporary market research reports as it has been in subsequent historical analyses.[104] In this article we have also illustrated the importance of the other three aspects that structured our interviewees' discussions.

103. Gronow and Warde, *Ordinary Consumption.*

104. Joyce, *The New Housewife*; Davies and Elliott, "The Evolution of the Empowered Consumer"; Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good*, 120.

Reorienting analyses of retail innovations, including the early supermarket, to consider the input of the shopper offers a number of opportunities for further study. For example, the supermarket has been shown to have developed through a stage-like development pattern, with more advanced formats emerging from prototypical examples.[105] What is less clear at present is the extent to which the shopper's contribution to the recursive nature of supermarket innovation is constant over both time and space or reveals distinct periodicities and geographies.[106] Similarly, our focus here has been on evaluating the shopper's role in co-creation, rather than the retailer's or that of other network members. Our reading would suggest that early supermarket retailers were only in the initial stages of acknowledging and seeking to better manage the capacity of shoppers to contribute to the value-creation activity, being still more inclined to order and classify their target market through market research than engage in meaningful dialogue with shoppers to enable learning together.[107] However, this is a topic that demands further research before we can draw a definitive conclusion.

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105. Goldman, "Stages in the Development of the Supermarket"; Alexander, "Format Development"; Shaw and Alexander, "British Co-operative Societies."

106. Arnould, Price and Malshe, "Toward a Cultural Resource-Based Theory," in *The Service-Dominant Logic of Marketing*, eds. Lusch and Vargo.

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